

ROAD COMMISSION

for OAKLAND COUNTY

**Comments of Brent O. Bair, Managing Director
Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC)
To the House Transportation Committee
At the public hearing on transportation Funding
Washtenaw Community College, April 23, 2010**

- I. Good morning Committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
 - a. For those of you not familiar with RCOC, we are responsible for the largest county road system in Michigan, with more than 2,700 miles of county roads. That's second in size only to the state highway system.
 - b. In addition to serving the 1.2 million residents of Oakland County, our roads also handle the 300,000 motorists who commute into Oakland County every day to work.

- II. First, I'd like to review MTF funding history
 - a. Michigan is among the bottom 4 states in the nation in per capita state & local road funding (per US Census Bureau data as compiled by *Governing* magazine).
 - b. We have been in the bottom 10 states for more than 45 years.
 - c. People notice a difference in Michigan roads compared to other states and wonder why we can't do a better job in Michigan.
 - d. The answer to this question is funding.
 - e. We are now in a road-funding crisis: Our roads are crumbling and we can't fix them.

- III. MTF funding
 - a. RCOC's MTF funding has dropped by nearly 5 percent in the last 10 years ('00 to '09).
 - b. During that period, all of the costs associated with maintaining the roads have risen dramatically.
 - c. Some examples of RCOC cost increases over the last 10 years:
 - i. Asphalt: 83%
 - ii. Salt: 138%
 - iii. Diesel fuel: 142%
 - iv. Anything using steel: More than 100%

- IV. What has this meant for RCOC?
 - a. Reduction of 83 staff positions since 2007 (15%)
 - b. This is 75 fewer employees than 1974
 - c. 40 of these were snowplow drivers
 - d. Reduction in the level of all services provided:
 - i. Winter maintenance
 - ii. Gravel road maintenance
 - iii. Pothole patching
 - iv. Sign maintenance
 - v. Guardrail maintenance
 - vi. Etc.

- e. Elimination of all 100 percent-RCOC funded resurfacing and concrete repair work.
 - i. Consequently, the rate of deterioration of RCOC roads has increased.
 - ii. The percentage of roads in good condition has decreased
- f. The only new pavement going down is when we use federal funds.
- g. At the current rate that we receive federal funds, it will take us 143 years to repave all of our federal-aid-eligible roads.
- h. Only one-third of the system is federal-aid eligible.

V. What does this mean long-term?

- a. Continued deterioration of the road system, at an increased rate.
- b. Reduced ability to attract businesses to Oakland County (has been the “economic engine” for the state for decades).
- c. The longer routine maintenance is deferred, the more it will ultimately cost.
- d. We can either pay to maintain the roads today – or pay a LOT MORE to restore them in the future.
- e. Do we really want to be the state known for crumbling roads, returning paved roads to gravel, etc.?

VI. Have we made reforms and improved efficiencies? Yes!

- a. Employed asset management to road maintenance.
- b. Joined purchasing consortiums (example: salt).
- c. Inter-agency cooperation with other road agencies.
- d. Regional cooperation.
- e. Subcontracted some winter & summer road maintenance.
- f. Deployed liquid brine for anti-icing.
- g. Use of pulverized asphalt on gravel roads.
- h. Increased use of technology: GIS, SEMSIM/GPS, adaptive traffic signals (FAST-TRAC), Roadview, wireless signal communications, automated bridge de-icing, enterprise software system, LED traffic signals, etc.
- i. Doing almost as much work with far fewer employees.
- j. Never added very many new employees as the county grew in the 70s, 80s and 90s.
- k. Instead, privatized many activities, and maintained the same employment level.

VII. What can you do?

- a. I’m very concerned about the tendency lately to look for “quick & dirty” solutions to this problem.
- b. Example: Find money to provide MDOT’s match for federal funds for this year.
- c. The problems with this:
 - i. Doesn’t address the locals’ inability to provide the local match for federal funds.
 - ii. Federal funds CANNOT be used to maintain the road system.
 - iii. Even when Michigan could match all the federal funds in recent years, the overall condition of the state’s road system still declined.
 - iv. We need a REAL solution that will solve the problem for more than just one year.

- v. We were very fortunate that this winter was mild – the reduced staff levels at road agencies across the state was not as apparent as it might have been.
- vi. I am worried that we won't be so lucky next winter.
- d. Nobody likes tax increases.
- e. Sometimes, though, we have to pay today to prevent dumping a far larger burden on future generations.
- f. I urge you to support the bills introduced by Rep. Byrnes and Ball to raise the gas and diesel taxes.